

Chapter 5

RETHINKING ASSESSMENT

It is not that tests ought to drive the curriculum, or that teachers ought to teach to the test. Rather, good assessment is an integral part of good instruction.

HERMAN, ASCHBACHER, & WINTERS



RETHINKING ASSESSMENT

The purpose of student assessment is to provide meaningful feedback that reflects the student's individual growth and allows the student and teacher to plan purposeful and appropriate learning experiences. Meaningful assessment focuses on the knowledge, skills, and behaviors evidenced in the curriculum. Various levels of assessment occur—national, state, local, and classroom—each with a distinct opportunity to provide teachers, students, and parents with important information about student progress.

STATE ASSESSMENT

In the near future, comprehensive health education and physical education will become part of the statewide testing program. Over the next five years, committees of New Jersey educators and measurement specialists will assist in the development and implementation of meaningful assessment tools that accurately reflect student achievement of the *Comprehensive Health Education and Physical Education Standards*. By the year 2005-2006, New Jersey high school students will be required to pass the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) in all content and workplace readiness areas in order to receive a state-endorsed diploma. Health and physical education will be one of the required elements tested at each level of the statewide assessment program: the Elementary School Proficiency Assessment (ESPA); the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA); and the HSPA. At this writing, the assessment tools for comprehensive health and physical education have not yet been developed; therefore, this chapter focuses primarily on classroom assessment in preparation for statewide testing. As more information about the assessment of health and physical education becomes available, school district staff will be advised.

CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

“Anyone can pass gym. Just show up in your gym shorts and sneaks. Health class? What a joke! All we do is fill in diagrams of body parts and see ancient movies about strange diseases we’ll never get in a million years! What a waste?” Sound familiar? If these words can be heard in your halls, classrooms, and gymnasiums, wake up! The days of “show up and pass” are over. Teachers of health and physical education are held to the same high levels of accountability as their math and science counterparts. It is no longer acceptable to simply test students at the end of a unit. If a teacher does not have evidence of student progress (e.g., multiple measures of fitness across time) how can the student be expected to meet the *Standards*? Physical education teachers who only measure sport and fitness skills and pay little or no attention to cognitive assessment are denying students important information that can assist them to achieve the *Standards*. Health teachers who only measure content knowledge and never evaluate student progress in skill development are short-changing students. Student assessment is a critical element of instruction, providing the student with important information about his/her progress. This information enables the student and teacher to collaborate on specific instructional goals so that every student can achieve the *Core Curriculum Content Standards*.

Student assessment is a complex, ever-changing issue. New forms of assessment result from educational reform, developments in psychology and neuroscience, and advances in technology. Classroom teachers need to expand their repertoire of assessment tools and ensure that they are inextricably linked to standards-based instruction. To implement appropriate assessment practices, teachers and school administrators need to consider the overall curricular plan and answer the following questions:

- What information do we need?
- How often do we need this information?
- What will we do with the information?
- What do students, teachers, and parents actually learn from the results?
- How can assessment and instruction become seamlessly institutionalized?

Effective, meaningful assessment demands that teachers know and articulate the major instructional goals. Teachers should ask “What do I want my students to accomplish?” then set priorities and clearly define the aim and purpose of the assessment tasks. In this context, teachers need to consider the following questions:

- What important knowledge do I want my students to develop?
- What personal, interpersonal, and life skills do I want them to develop?
- What metacognitive skills do I want them to develop?
- What types of problems do I want them to solve?
- What physical skills do I want them to develop?

Stating what you are teaching does not answer what the student is learning. Teachers need to focus on what the student can do now that he/she could not do before. How does the student’s skill level or knowledge directly relate to instruction? How can a teacher be confident that what he/she is teaching is really what the student needs? How can a teacher be sure that students understand and can use the content of instruction?

Choosing the appropriate assessment measure requires careful consideration of the instructional content; student learning styles; the teacher’s comfort level; and space, facilities, and time. Special attention needs to be paid to the correlation of the measure to the content and skills prescribed in the *Core Curriculum Content Standards*. Sample assessment practices are presented in Appendix C. In addition, teachers need to consider the following questions (Herman, Aschbacher, & Winters, 1992) as they organize their instructional assessment activities:

- Does the task or measure match the instructional intent?
- Does the task or measure adequately represent the content and skills you expect students to attain?
- Does the task or measure enable students to demonstrate their progress and capabilities?
- Does the task or measure involve authentic, real-world applications?
- Does the task or measure lend itself to an interdisciplinary approach?
- Can more than one goal/standard be met using this task or measure?

One cannot discuss assessment without some discussion of scoring. A *rubric* is a fixed scale listing the characteristics of performance for each point on the scale. Rubrics are most often used to rate performance tasks, essays, and portfolios and can be modified to serve as a self-assessment tool for students. In physical education, a task card used by a second-grade student to rate overhand throws is an example of a simple rubric. In health class, students utilize a critical elements card to review and assess a partner's response to a problem-solving scenario. As students and teachers become more comfortable using rubrics, they can be used to address student performance, content knowledge or collaborative qualities. Sample rubrics can be found in Appendix C.

ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

Assessment strategies are determined by the kind of learning to be evaluated. Here are some examples of commonly used assessment methods.

Selected Response/Forced Choice Items

Students are forced to provide a single correct response. This type of assessment has a valid role in assessing pure knowledge and facts, if used as part of a spectrum of evaluation. Examples include traditional multiple-choice items and matching tests. True/false tests and short answer responses, including fill-in-the-blanks, are selected response/forced choice items.

Essay

Essay writing is used to evaluate a student's grasp of important concepts, ideas, and relationships. Essay writing may involve developing an explanation or critique of a subject. Students present an argument, test a hypothesis, compare two ideas, or demonstrate situational decision making. Writing an effective essay requires the student to think logically while relating accurate information and ideas.

Performance Tasks

Performance tasks require the student to actively accomplish complex tasks using prior knowledge and recent learning and skills. These tasks demonstrate a deeper understanding of the content and skills and increase student engagement. Performance assessment involves students in situations where they must construct responses that clearly illustrate that they can apply the knowledge. Authentic assessment involves students in "real-life" activities that tap higher-order thinking skills. These tasks invoke real-world applications and require time and effort on the part of the teacher and student.

Portfolio

A portfolio is a collection of student work, over time, that represents that individual's best work. Included in the portfolio are products from performance tasks that show effort, progress, and achievement. Portfolio assessment allows a teacher to view student progress, considering growth and development. Portfolios can serve to engage students in learning content and help students develop skills of reflection and self-evaluation. Portfolios enable the teacher to document student learning in areas that do not lend themselves to more traditional forms of assessment. Assessment portfolios may be used to demonstrate mastery in any content area and may span any period of time (e.g., one

unit, one semester). Maintaining student portfolios facilitates better communication with students and parents.

Teacher Observation

Teacher observation, long a favorite assessment measure of the physical education teacher, is an informal method of noting student progress. This method is only valid, however, if the teacher is knowledgeable and uses appropriate criteria. Detailed observations should be written in a daily log or tape-recorded. An electronic clipboard or message pad can enhance the teacher's ability to transmit classroom observations to standardized student progress forms. Written anecdotal comments can be an effective assessment tool if based on established criteria that has meaning for instruction. Students need to know the evaluative criteria used by the teacher during formal and informal observations. Teachers need to provide students with feedback to improve performance.

Student Self-Assessment

Involving students in the assessment of their own learning is central to the development of higher order metacognitive skills. Students get involved in goal setting, developing action plans, and keeping track of progress using a log, diary, or chart. Students pose specific questions to guide their own assessment and become actively engaged in the learning and assessment process. One of the enormous benefits of student self-assessment is that it permits a sharing of accountability for student learning.

Assessment Conferences

Assessment conferences offer an opportunity for the student and teacher to meet and discuss progress, to plan new activities to meet goals, and to learn more about each other on the path to learning. Assessment conferences may include any of the above-named measures as part of the data shared. Assessment conferences enable teachers to see their students as complete people with special interests, ideas, and experiences.

SUMMARY

In preparation for the statewide assessment program in comprehensive health education and physical education, local school districts should evaluate their own policies and practices regarding student assessment. All teachers should be actively engaged in developing and implementing classroom assessment practices that employ a variety of methods, cover the essential knowledge and skills required by the *Standards*, and challenge students to use higher order thinking skills. Simply put, student grades in health and physical education should not be based on mere participation, appropriate attire, or effort. Participation in an interscholastic athletic program or alternative physical activity program may not enable a student to achieve the *Comprehensive Health Education and Physical Education Curriculum Standards*. The *Standards* require students to demonstrate an understanding of skilled performance on several levels. Furthermore, students must be able to communicate the theory behind improved performance in a wide variety of lifetime recreational pursuits and fitness activities. Teachers and students should collaborate to develop goals for learning that truly reflect student needs and that enable each and every student to meet the *Comprehensive Health Education and Physical Education Curriculum Standards*. Students and teachers will become more accustomed to the higher demands these *Standards* place on them only if they actively engage in realistic and challenging assessment measures.